A NEW YEAR WITH THE RECORD CLEAR

Preaching and Teaching Resources

ADRIAN ROGERS

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A New Year with the Record Clear

SERMON REFERENCE: Philemon 1-4, 10-12
LWF SERMON NUMBER: #1758

Sin has a way of disorienting our lives; but the Gospel deals directly with the defilement, distance, and debt of sin.

In his letter to Philemon, the Apostle Paul indirectly crafts an intriguing story of redemption. The story of Philemon and Onesimus shows us how to start a new year with the record clear.

After coming to Christ, Philemon became such a Christian, he set up a church in his own house. However, Philemon had a slave named Onesimus, who stole from his master and ran away.

At the same time, Paul was a house prisoner in Rome, and through divine circumstances, Paul and Onesimus were brought together, and Paul led Onesimus to the Lord.

After discipling him for a while, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter. This letter itself is a wonderful illustration of salvation.

First, the Gospel renews what was defiled by sin.

Philemon 1:10-11 says, "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."

The name 'Onesimus' means 'profitable.' In sin, we are all runaway slaves, altogether unprofitable. Yet, when we're saved and begin to become more like Jesus Christ, we are made beautiful and profitable to His kingdom.

The Gospel also receives what sin once separated.

Paul asked Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul. (See Philemon 1:17.) Likewise, through Jesus Christ, God receives us, who were once distanced by our slavery to sin, as He would receive His son, Jesus.

Finally, the Gospel deals with the debt of sin.

"But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account" (Philemon 1:18).

Paul takes on Onesimus' debt as his own. This is a picture of what Jesus has done for us.

Adrian Rogers says, "Every blot, every blur, every blemish has been put on the account of the Lord Jesus Christ."

We can start the new year with a clear record, because our spiritual debts have been paid in full by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Life Application
Have you been running away from God? Are you ready for a new start, a clear record? Put your faith in Jesus Christ, who has dealt with the defilement, distance, and debt of sin.

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1) INTRODUCTION
   a) Sin has a way of disorienting and ruining our lives.
      i) There is the defilement of sin.
      ii) There is the distance (separation) that sin brings.
      iii) There is the debt that sin incurs.
   b) The Gospel of Jesus deals with the defilement, distance, and debt of sin.
      i) We will see this as we study the book of Philemon.
   c) Philemon 1-4, 10-12
      i) Apphia was probably Philemon's wife, and Archippus was their son.
      ii) In this passage, "mine own bowels" means "my own heart".
      iii) Philemon was a godly man whom the Apostle Paul had led to Christ.
         (1) Philemon set up a church in his own house.
         (2) Apphia and Philemon would welcome people into their house.
            (a) Sunday after Sunday, they would worship the Lord.
      iv) This was before slavery had come crashing down.
         (1) In the New Testament, we don't find a frontal assault on slavery, but we find out that slavery was a system that could not stand in the light of the Gospel.
            (a) By changing people's hearts, God did away with the institution of slavery.
      v) Philemon had a slave whose name was Onesimus.
      vi) Onesimus stole something from Philemon and ran away to Rome.
         (1) Rome was the center of the Roman Empire, and it was noted for its worldliness and wickedness.
      vii) At this same time, Paul was a house prisoner in Rome.
         (1) He was guarded, but he had people who could come in and out.
            (a) In a way, Paul was carrying on a ministry from inside of the prison.
      viii) The providence of God brought Onesimus and Paul together.
         (1) The Bible doesn't tell us how they got together.
      ix) Paul won the runaway slave to Christ.
         (1) This was more than happenstance; it was providential.
            (a) We can see the hidden hand of God in the whole thing.
               (i) That is the way God works.
   d) Many of us would see our loved ones come to Christ if we were to get serious about praying.
      i) God will not force His will upon anyone.
      ii) But God can arrange circumstances in ways that we would not dream of, if we would begin to pray and believe God.
   e) Evidently, Paul was beginning to disciple Onesimus.
      i) Paul instructed Onesimus that he needed to go back and make things right with Philemon.

ii) With the help of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a letter for Onesimus to take back and give to Philemon.
(1) This is the letter that we have.
(a) This is what the book of Philemon is about.
(2) The letter itself is a wonderful illustration of salvation.
(a) God wants you saved so much that He put many illustrations in the Bible.

f) In today's message, we will look at how the Gospel deals with the following problems:
i) The defilement of sin.
ii) The division of sin; the distance sin causes.
iii) The debt of sin.
(1) Onesimus had all three of these problems, and so does every son and daughter of Adam who has ever lived.

g) In a very real sense, every one of us is a runaway slave.
i) We will see a picture of ourselves in the book of Philemon.

2) THE GOSPEL DEALS WITH THE DEFILEMENT OF SIN (PHILEMON 10-11)

a) The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives renewal for the defilement caused by sin.
b) Philemon 10-11
i) Paul won Onesimus, his son in the faith, to Christ when Paul was a prisoner.
ii) In verse 11, Paul makes a play on words.
(1) The name "Onesimus" means "Profitable".
(a) In Bible times when people would name their children, they would come up with a name that would be a prayer, a prophecy, and a blessing.
(i) If they wanted a child to be a particular thing in life, then they would choose a name that they felt would be fitting.
(ii) The name would have meaning.
(b) This little boy, who later became a slave, was named "Profitable".
(2) Onesimus, who was named "Profitable", became unprofitable but is now profitable.

c) Those of us who are lost have become like Onesimus.
i) We are unprofitable.
ii) Romans 3:10-12
(1) Every sinner is unprofitable.
(a) We are just like that runaway slave.

d) God made us for His service.
i) We are to be bondslaves of the Almighty.
ii) But we are in sin and rebellion; therefore, we are unprofitable slaves.

e) The Gospel of Jesus Christ takes an unprofitable person and makes that person like the Lord Jesus Christ.
i) We are now profitable.
ii) Jesus makes something beautiful of our lives.
iii) That is what God has done for everyone who has been saved.

3) THE GOSPEL DEALS WITH THE DIVISION OF SIN (PHILEMON 12, 15-17)
   a) The distance, the separation that sin causes.
   b) Philemon 12
      i) "Receive him…"
   c) Philemon 15
      i) "Receive him…"
   d) Philemon 17
      i) "Receive him as myself."
         (1) Paul tells Philemon that he should receive Onesimus as he would receive him (Paul).
   e) Onesimus was a runaway slave, and he could have been put to death.
      i) But Paul wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus as Philemon would receive Paul.
         (1) There is not a better illustration in all the Bible of the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ.
   f) God receives us because Jesus asks Him to do so.
      i) What has Jesus said to the Father?
         (1) He or she was a runaway slave; they were unprofitable.
         (2) Now, they are profitable.
            (a) Father, receive them as You would receive Me.
   g) Philemon 15-16
      i) Paul asked Philemon to take Onesimus back and to receive him, not as a slave, but as a brother.
   h) God receives us in the Gospel as He would receive His own dear Son.
      i) Ephesians 1:6
         (1) The Bible speaks of the Gospel, which is "To the praise of the glory of His grace."
      ii) John 17:23
      iii) When we are in Christ, God receives us as He would receive Christ.
      iv) 1 John 3:1

4) THE GOSPEL DEALS WITH THE DEBT OF SIN (PHILEMON 18)
   a) Onesimus owed his master, and he had nothing with which to pay.
   b) Philemon 18
      i) Whatever Onesimus owed and whatever he took from Philemon that he could not restore, Paul said that he would repay it.
         (1) That is what Jesus does for us.
   c) We can start the New Year with a record clear and spiritually paid up.
      i) Every blot, every blur, and every blemish has been put on the account of the Lord Jesus Christ.
   d) If you have come to Christ, do not let anyone intimidate you because of your past life.
      i) Romans 8:33
         (1) God has called you just.
            (a) That means that your spiritual debts are paid in full by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ii) The devil is the accuser of the brethren, and he will try to accuse you.
(1) But who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

e) In Roman times when a person sinned against the state and had a debt he could not pay, he would be put in a debtor's prison.
i) His crime would be written out, and a certificate of debt would be nailed to the prison door.
ii) When he had paid all of his debt, the judge would write "Paid in full" across the certificate of debt.
(1) In the Greek language, this word is "Tetelestai".
(a) It is the same word that Jesus spoke on the cross.

f) Jesus paid all of our debt; it is finished.
i) If you are saved, then you have a certificate of debt.
ii) Like Onesimus, you can go to the Father.
(1) And Jesus said, "Anything you owe, put it on My account."

5) CONCLUSION

a) The little book of Philemon tells you that you can start the new year with the record clear.
i) A runaway slave can come home and have a fresh start.

b) Do you know Jesus personally? If not, you can pray to Him today by asking Him to come into your life.

c) Call upon Jesus today. Repent (turn) from your sins, and turn to Jesus. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life.
i) Romans 3:23
ii) Romans 10:9-10
iii) Romans 10:13
iv) Acts 16:31
v) John 3:16

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Find the epistle to Philemon just before the book of Hebrews, you'll almost miss it, it's only 25 verses. We call it a letter; it's more like a postcard. I want you to find it. It is one of the most personal and intimate letters in the entire New Testament. And I've chosen it today for the last Sunday of the old year, and the Sunday before the beginning of a New Year. And I want to be speaking to you today on this subject, "A New Year with the Record Clear".

Now sin has a way of disorienting and ruining our lives. There's the defilement of sin. There's the separation, the distance that sin brings. There's the debt that sin incurs. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ deals with defilement. It deals with distance. It deals with debt. And we're going to see that as we study this book.

Look in the first few verses, Philemon 1 through 4, "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia," now Apphia was probably Philemon's wife, "and Archippus our fellowsoldier," I believe that was their son, "and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers." And then, skip down to verses 10 through 12, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me; whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels;" or my own heart. Now what is all of this about? Well, let me tell you what it's about. It's one of the most intriguing stories in all of the Bible.

There was a good man, a godly man. This man's name was Philemon. The Apostle Paul had led Philemon to Christ. And Philemon had become such a Christian that he set up a church in his own house. The church came, and Apphia and Philemon would welcome people into their house Sunday after Sunday and they would worship the Lord. But Philemon had a slave. Now this was before slavery had come crashing down. And in the New Testament, we don't find a frontal assault on slavery, but we find out this, that slavery was a system that could not stand in the light, the white heat, of the Gospel. And by changing men's hearts, God did away with the institution of slavery, cruel as it was in those days. He had a slave. Philemon had a slave whose name was Onesimus.

And Onesimus, upon a day, stole some things from his master, Philemon, and he ran away. He ran away to Rome. Now Rome, the center of the Roman Empire, was also noted for its vice, its worldliness, its wickedness. And here is Onesimus, a run-away slave, and he finds himself in Rome. It so happens that the Apostle Paul, who had led Philemon to Christ, is now in Rome. He is a prisoner, a house prisoner. He's in a house, but he's guarded, but he has people who can come in and out. And, in a way, he's carrying on a ministry from inside that prison. And it so happens that Onesimus, who has run away from Philemon, he takes a long journey, he goes all the way to Rome. And the providence of God brings Onesimus and Paul together. How it happened, I don't know. Whether Onesimus got in trouble and was thrown in jail and there he met the Apostle Paul. Whether he'd heard of Paul and went to hear him preach. How they got together the Bible does not tell us, but Paul won the run-away slave to Christ.

Now Paul had already won his master to Christ. And now Paul has won the slave to Christ. I say that is more than happenstance; it has to be providential. You just see the hidden hand of God in the whole thing. And God works that way, folks, He really does, and we need to learn this. If you have loved ones, if you have loved ones that are lost, loved ones that don't know the Lord, or loved ones that do know the Lord, who are away from God, let me tell you one of the most wonderful stories I've ever heard.

Dr. Harry Ironsides, used to be the Pastor of Moody Church, told this story, and it has stuck in my heart through many, many years. Dr. Ironsides said there was a man whose name was Sam Hadley. Sam Hadley had been a drunkard, an alcoholic, down in the gutter, and God wonderfully and marvelously saved Sam Hadley. Sam Hadley went across America preaching the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ and thousands and thousands were saved through the testimony of Sam Hadley.

Upon a time, Sam Hadley was to preach in Oakland, California. And he was going to preach there, and there was a man whose name was Wilbur Chapman who said, "I'm going to let him preach at midnight." Now I don't know if we'd ever have many services that are packed out at midnight. But they rented the biggest theater in Oakland that they could possibly rent. And then around 10:30 they said they would have a parade through downtown Oakland. So he got about a thousand Christians, and a thousand Christians began to march through downtown Oakland. And they were singing and praising the Lord. And people came out and began to follow this parade.

They went into this auditorium, into this theater. It was absolutely packed from the floor to the gallery. There was no more room in the theater. Harry Ironsides said he was sitting up in the balcony himself, looking down on this whole thing. Wilbur Chapman was the Master of Ceremonies. Sam Hadley had come to preach. And the place was packed. Harry Ironsides said, "As I looked down, I saw a man who had come in the back door, standing in the wings of the stage, and that man was trying to hear. He had his hand cupped over his ear like this, trying to hear, and he couldn't hear. So he moved to another section of the stage and was still trying to listen. Still couldn't hear. And he got closer." Ironsides said, "I was watching all of this."

Finally, Wilbur Chapman saw the man standing there and realized the poor man was trying to hear. And so when Sam Hadley had gotten up to speak, Wilbur Chapman, the Master of the Ceremonies, went and got the man and put him right in that chair, right where Sam Hadley had been. He said, "That's always an empty chair," so he put him right in that chair. And so that's the setting for the whole service. And so, Sam Hadley is preaching the power of Christ to save an alcoholic, to save a person who has been in the grip of the vice that he had been in. And the wonderful, glorious story that, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation."

Then, after he had preached, Wilbur Chapman got up to come and close the service. So Sam Hadley couldn't sit in his chair, so he set in that chair. And so he's sitting next to this man. And he turns to him and introduces himself to him. They talk for a while, and then Sam Hadley gets up and comes to the platform. And he said, "People, there's a story I want to share with you and it concerns the man sitting in that chair right there. His name is Jim." He said, "On my way to preach here in Oakland," he said, "I was traveling by railroad car." He said, "I left New York. I stopped in Detroit. In Detroit I preached to a rescue mission on my way here to Oakland. After I preached," he said, "an old couple came up to me and said, 'Mr. Hadley, would you please come and take supper with us?'" He said, "No, I'm tired. I can't do it.

My body is not well. I must rest." They said, "Please, sir, we need you. We made preparation. Would you please come to our humble home and take supper with us?" He said, "If you insist, I will. Just give me a moment to rest."

He rested for a while and went to that home. And that couple said, "Sir, the reason we wanted to talk to you is we have learned that you're going to California to the San Francisco Bay area to preach. Let us tell you about our son, Jim. Our son Jim was raised a good boy. We prayed for him. We tried to teach him right. We took him to church. But he got in with the wrong crowd. He began to drink. And drink then mastered him and he became a slave to drink. We cannot tell you how our hearts broke the first night he came home drunk. We wept over him. We prayed for him. One night late, he came in and told us, 'I must leave this area. I cannot stay. Under the influence of alcohol, I've done something. If I'm caught, it will go badly with me. I must go immediately. I must flee.'" And Jim kissed his father and mother good-bye. They didn't even know where he'd gone. The days, the weeks, the months, the years had gone. They had not heard from their son.

They said, "Mr. Hadley, the other day we got a letter from San Francisco from a friend of ours who knows Jim. He says he was riding on a street corner. He looked over there in San Francisco. And he said, 'On that street corner, I am positive it was your son, Jim. He was standing there. The street car went by. I could not stop, but I'm positive your son is alive. Your son is alive. He is living in the San Francisco Bay area.' And they said, "Now, sir, you're going to that area. And God has delivered you from alcohol. We want our son, Jim, to hear the message that God has given you. And what we've come to ask you for is this: that between now and the time that you speak in Oakland, that every day you will pray for our son Jim, that he can hear you, every day. At this hour, we will be on our knees. And, Mr. Hadley, would you promise us, God helping you, at the same time you will join us in prayer for our beloved son?" He said, "That was two weeks ago." He said, "For every day I have kept faith with that couple. At that hour for two solid weeks I have prayed for Jim with that couple. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you that this is Jim sitting in this seat."

What had happened, Jim was in a saloon. The parade went by. Jim was drinking. He saw the parade. He wondered what it was. He came out. He followed them. He tried to get in the auditorium. He couldn't get in the auditorium, the police would not let anybody in. It was too crowded, too filled with people from floor to ceiling. He tried every door. Finally, he found a back door. Came in at the stage and finally was ushered to that chair. And he said to the crowd, "Jim wants Jesus. Would you pray for him?" And, on his knees, Jim gave his heart to Jesus Christ. The last time, Dr. Ironsides said, that he saw the two of them, Dr. Chapman and Jim were going to the telephone to call back and say, "Your prayers have been answered. I have found Christ as my personal Lord and Savior."

That's a wonderful story, isn't it? It's a wonderful story. You say, "Pastor, do you think it was happenstance?" Well, I want to ask you, do you think it was happenstance that he set in Sam Hadley's chair? Do you think that just happened? That all of this is just a happenstance? No, friend. I want to tell you that God answered prayer. And I believe that many of us would have our loved ones come to Christ if we were to get serious about praying. God won't force His will upon anyone, but I tell you, God can arrange circumstances and ways that you would not dream of if we would begin to pray and believe God.

And I don't think that it was happenstance that Paul, who had won Philemon to Christ, now comes in contact with this run-away slave. And so here's Paul and this run-away slave. And Paul has won him

to Christ. And, evidently, Paul is beginning to disciple him. And one day, perhaps Onesimus says to Paul, "Paul, there's something bothering me." And Paul said, "Well, I could tell there's something bothering you. You want to tell me what it is?" "Well, Paul, I'm a run-away slave. I have run away from my master whose name was Philemon. And not only am I run-away, but I stole my master's goods. Now I can't get peace about it. Now that I've become a Christian, what should I do?" Well, Paul says, "You need to go back. You need to make it right with Philemon." "You mean, I'm to go back?" "Yes."

"Well, don't you understand that a slave is nothing but a living tool?" Don't you understand what he could do to me? Don't you understand that he could have me put to death, that he could mutilate my body, that he could have me branded? Don't you understand that? And, besides that, what I stole from him I don't have any longer, I've wasted it. I've dissipated it. It's gone! You still think I ought to go back?" "Yes, you need to go back.

Let me tell you something, Onesimus. I know your master, Philemon. I led him to faith in Jesus Christ. Now I want you to go back, but I'm going to sit down and I'm going to write a letter. And I want you to take this letter that I've written. I want you to take it back, Onesimus, and give it to Philemon. I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit to help me to write this letter. I'm going to write it. I'll give it to you, and you give it to Philemon. You don't have to speak for yourself. The letter will speak for you." And that's the letter that we have. That is what the book of Philemon is about. This is the letter that a run-away slave took back and gave to his master.

Now can you imagine that scene? There's a knock at the door. Philemon comes to the door and he looks. He says, "Onesimus, so you've come home. Are you in trouble? What's the difficulty? Apphia, look here. Look who's here. It's Onesimus. He's come back." Onesimus says to Philemon, "Please read this." He says, "What is..." "Just read it, please." He takes the scroll and he unrolls it. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus, our fellowsoldier, and to the church." Hey, Apphia, it's a letter from Paul. Onesimus, how do you know Paul? Where did you meet Paul? How do you know Paul?" "Well, Paul gave me this letter. Paul led me to Christ. I have been saved. And Paul told me to give you this letter." Now that's the setting. That's the setting. And it is wonderful, the letter itself is a wonderful, wonderful illustration of salvation, and I want you to see it. God wants you saved so much that He's putting so many illustrations in the Bible. They are incredible. And I want you to see what they're like.

Here are three things I want to lay on your heart, three things out of this book. Remember what I said that sin does? There's the problem of the defilement of sin. There's the problem of the division of sin, the distance that sin causes. And there's the problem of the debt of sin. Now, Onesimus had all three of these problems, and so does every son of Adam that has ever lived. In a very real sense, every one of us is a run-away slave. And we are going to see a picture of ourselves in this little booklet.

Now, first of all, I want you to see how the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives renewal for **the defilement caused by sin**. Look, if you will, in Philemon verses 10 and 11. Now here's what Paul says to Philemon, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." What that simply means is, "He's my son in the faith. I won him to Christ when I was a prisoner." And he said, "I'm going to ask you a favor now from Onesimus, who is my son, the one I've led to Christ." Now watch verse 11, "Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me." Now Paul had a sense of humor,

and what he's doing here is making a play on words. Do you know what the name Onesimus means? It means "Profitable." It means "Profitable."

In Bible times, when people would name their children, they would come up with a name that would be a prayer and a prophecy and a blessing. If they would want a child to come out and be a particular thing in life, many times they would choose a name that they felt would be fitting. The name would have meaning. And so they named this little boy, who later became a slave, they named him "Profitable." And Paul says, "Profitable for you became unprofitable, but now he's profitable again." And so what he's doing is just playing with words, as preachers are want to do. He's just playing with words. And he says, "Now here's Onesimus. He was an unprofitable servant, but now Onesimus, who was named "Profitable," who became unprofitable, is now profitable, and I want you to receive him again."

Now I want you to see that all of those of us who are lost, have become like Onesimus, unprofitable. Put in your margin Romans chapter 3 verses 10 and following, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable." That's what God says every sinner is. We're just like that run-away slave; we are unprofitable. God made us for His service. We are to be bondslaves of the Almighty. But we are in sin and rebellion, unprofitable slaves. And it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has taken an unprofitable person like Adrian, or like Bob, and made him profitable. And, of course, Mike, who was very unprofitable, and puts us together and makes us like the Lord Jesus Christ; now profitable. You see, Jesus makes something beautiful of our lives.

A piece of poetry that I read long ago speaks of an auction of an old violin. Twas battered and scarred. And the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on the old violin, but he held it up with a smile. "What am I bidden, good folks", said he, "and who'll start the bidding for me? A dollar, a dollar, who'll make it two? Only two? Who'll make it three? Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going and gone for three?" But no. From the room far back a grey-haired man came forward and picked up the bow. Then, wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening the loose strings, he played a melody pure and sweet as a caroling angel sings. The music ceased. And the auctioneer with a voice quiet and low said, "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with a bow. "A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two? Two thousand! And who'll make it three? Three thousand once, three thousand twice, going and gone," said he. The people cheered, but some of them cried, "We don't quite understand. What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply. "The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with a life out of tune, all battered and scarred by sin, is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin. A mess of pottage and a glass of wine, a game and he travels on. He's going once. He's going twice. He's going. He's almost gone. But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd can never quite understand the worth of a soul and the change that is wrought by the touch of the Master's hand. That's what God had done for one who was unprofitable. And battered and scarred, a run-away slave. And, friend, that's what God has done for every one of us who've been saved. We're run-away slaves. The Apostle Paul says, "We're altogether become unprofitable." He was unprofitable. You see, the Gospel of Jesus deals with the defilement of sin.

I'll tell you something else it does. Not only does it deal with the defilement of sin, but it deals with **the division of sin**, the distance, the separation that sin causes. Look again, if you will, here in Philemon verse 12, look at it, "Whom I have sent again, that thou therefore," underscore this word, "receive him."

Look, if you will, in verse 15, "For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him." Look, if you will, in verse 17, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him," now watch this qualification, "as myself." "Philemon, I want you to receive Onesimus, and I want you to receive him like you would receive me." He was a run-away slave. He could have been put to death. And now Paul says, "I want you, Philemon, to treat him as you would treat me." We don't have a better illustration in all the Bible of the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you know that God has received me today because Jesus has asked Him to do so? And do you know what Jesus has said to the Father? "Father, Adrian was a run-away slave. He was unprofitable. He's now profitable. And Father, I want You to receive Adrian Rogers as You would receive Me." Can you imagine when Philemon is reading this letter, and he says, "Apphia, look at this. Why, Paul has asked us to take our slave back and to receive him, not as a slave anymore, we are to receive him as a brother." Look, if you will, in verse 15 and 16, "Perhaps ye therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever, not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved." "Why, that's the way we're to take our slave back. No longer a slave. A brother, and a brother beloved."

"Onesimus, come in, Onesimus. Apphia, get the guest room ready." "You're not going to put him in the slave quarters?" "Of course, we're not going to put him the slave quarters. Would we put Paul in the slave quarters; Paul, who led us to Christ? We're putting Onesimus in the guest quarters. Apphia, fix a royal meal. We are going to receive this one as we would receive Paul himself." And, folks, I want to tell you how God receives me this morning and how God receives you. God receives you in the Gospel as He would receive His own dear Son.

Let me give you some verses, Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 6. The Bible speaks of the Gospel, which is, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted," received, "in the beloved." John chapter 17 verse 23, "I in them, and Thou in Me," Jesus is praying, "that they may be made perfect in one." Jesus is praying, "Father, listen. I am in Adrian, and he's in Me. We're perfect in one, "that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." How much does God love Adrian Rogers this morning? How much does God love Jim this morning? How much does God love you? How does God receive you when you're in Christ? He receives you as He would receive Christ.

"Near, so very near to God, nearer, I cannot be. For in the person of God's Son, I am as near as He. Dear, so dear to God, dearer I cannot be. For in the person of God's Son, I am as dear as He." You say that's blasphemy. No, it's not blasphemy. John, the Apostle, said in First John 3:1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hast bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And what an illustration of the Gospel when Paul says to Philemon, "Philemon, you take this run-away renegade and receive him as you would receive me."

You see, he deals with the defilement of sin. He deals with the separation, the distance, of sin. Then there's a third thing I want you to see what it deals with very quickly, and that is **the debt of sin**. Remember that Philemon owed his master and he had nothing to pay. But look, if you will, in Philemon verse 18. And, folks, listen, if you're saved, this will put you on shouting ground. Listen to it, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put it on my account." That's what Paul says. Paul says, "Whatever he owes you, whatever he took for you that he cannot restore, I, Paul, have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it." Hallelujah! That's what Jesus said about me. "Father, this renegade, Adrian, why,

I want You to receive him as You would receive Me. He was unprofitable, but now he's been changed. And if he owes You anything, put it on My account."

Did you know that you can start the New Year with a record clear, all paid up, spiritually paid up? Every blot, every blur, every blemish has been put on the account of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why do you think we sing that song, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin that left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow"? And don't you ever let anybody intimidate you because of your past life, if you've come to Christ.

Listen to this verse and put it in your margin, Romans 8 verse 33, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." God has called you just. That means your debts are paid in full, your spiritual debts paid in full by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the devil is the accuser of the brethren, and he will try, but who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?

I've already told you, in Roman times, in Roman law, when a man, who would sin against the state, when he had a debt he could not pay, they'd put him in prison, in a debtor's prison. And his crime would be listed, written out, on a Certificate of Debt. And it would be put on his jailhouse door; they would nail it on the door. And he would stay in prison until he had paid it all. And when he had paid it all, they would write across that Certificate of Debt, "cancelled, paid" and they would give it to him, and he could carry it out of the prison with him. And it said, "Paid in full." That's exactly the same word that Jesus spoke on the cross, "Tetelestai", "It is finished." It's the same word in Greek that was written on that Certificate of Debt. Jesus paid it all. It is finished. And I have a Certificate of Debt. And like Onesimus, I can go to the Father. And Jesus said, "Anything that Adrian owes You, put it on My account. Put on My account." "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."

Isn't that a precious book? Don't you love that little book of Philemon? Oh, what our Lord has done for us. And what it all tells me is this: You can start the New Year with the record clear. A run-away slave can come home and have a fresh start.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Father God, thank You, thank You for the Gospel. Thank You, Lord, for this wonderful little story that so blesses our hearts today. And I pray that those who are not saved in this building will come to know Christ as their personal Savior.

Now, while heads are bowed and eyes are closed. If you're not certain that you're saved, would you like to be saved, would you? Would you like to know that you really do have life? Jesus said, "I've come that you might have life." Could I lead you in a prayer? We'll call this prayer the sinner's prayer. And you can pray and accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. You can do it right now. Would you pray this prayer? "Dear God, I know that You love me. Thank You for loving me. And I know that You want to save me. Jesus, You died to save me and You promised to save me if I would trust You. Jesus, I do trust You. I believe You're the Son of God. I believe you paid for my sin with Your blood on the cross. I believe that God raised You from the dead. And now I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sin. Cleanse me. Come into my life. Take control of my life and begin today to make me the person You want me to be. And Jesus, give me the courage to make it public. Help me never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray, Amen."

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